
The Disfranchisement of Negroes

By THE REV. JOHN HAYNES HOLMES



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THE CONDITION OF THE NEGRO



THE condition of the Negro in the South to-day is an unspeakable disgrace to that American civilization of ours which we are fond of describing as founded upon the basic principle that "all men are created free and equal," and it is destined to be, I believe, centuries hence, one of the wonders of human history that in the face of the oppression which is being visited upon ten millions and more of our fellow-citizens at this moment, the rest of us are content to remain silent and indifferent.

The political freedom of the black man in this country was purchased at a price which staggered the world. Blood was poured forth like water, treasure was expended at the rate of millions a day, not in order merely that the Union might be preserved, but, more, that the Negro might be emancipated from the bonds of chattel slavery, and a government of the people, for the people and by the people might for the first time be established upon the earth.

A full half century has passed away since that momentous struggle was completed, and yet to-day, when we turn to the South and ask regarding the condition of our black brother, for whose freedom *our* fathers paid so dearly, we find that his condition is little better than that of *his* father, who was bought and sold upon the block. "The Negro to-day," says an influential New York clergyman, "is free on paper, the black man is one of our fellow-citizens in theory. He is reckoned as a man and not as an animal on the tables of the United States census." But, as a matter of fact, in the everyday world of practical affairs, the Negro is still a slave, and if there is anything that is perfectly plain in the public sentiment of the South, it is that the Negro shall be made to keep that place of shameful subjection from which we believed that he had been rescued by the blood and fury of the great rebellion. He is denied the ballot. He is socially ostracized. He is excluded from public buildings, railroad stations, libraries and theatres. He is denied justice in our courts. He is held as a peon on countless plantations. He is oppressed, degraded, enslaved in every political, industrial and social relation.

THE FEAR OF AGITATION

And yet, in the face of this unspeakable situation, we find the people of the North indifferent and complacent, and whenever any brave man arises to speak his condemnation of this iniquity, he is denounced as a careless agitator and ignorant fanatic. On every hand we are being told that the Negro question is too delicate for public discussion, and that we must leave this problem to be worked out naturally and quietly by the passage of time. We are told that to discuss this question upon a basis of simple justice will hurt business—as though business were of any importance when the life, liberty and happiness of millions of human beings are at stake. We are told that to discuss this question will offend the Southern whites—as though it were not our duty to offend them when they are the arrogant and blinded oppressors of an entire people. Are they not offending us, I should like to know, by their denial to the black man of those rights of industrial opportunity and political independence which have been bought and paid for by the blood of tens of thousands of heroic men? We are told that to discuss this question at the present time is inexpedient—as though expediency should ever be consulted when “wrong rules the land and waiting justice sleeps.” The truth of the matter is that there is but one thing to be considered here, and that is that ten millions and more of our fellow-citizens are being denied those rights and privileges which are legally and morally theirs, and any man who is silent in the face of this oppression is himself a partner to the crime which is being committed. Business, the feelings of our Southern fellow-citizens, questions of expediency—all these things must be cast aside once and for all, and like the Hebrew prophets of old, we must lift up our voices and spare not! It is with the Negro question as with every other great social question of our time.

THE WIDE DEMAND FOR JUSTICE

We are living in an age which is characterized by a growing demand for social justice. Never in the history of the world was there a time when people were so eager for such readjustment of social conditions that high and low, rich and poor, capitalist and laborer, shall be placed upon a plane of equal privilege and opportunity. Justice is the great battle cry of the hour. We are declaring that justice must be done to the laboring man who is injured in the performance of his duty, and therefore Employers' Liability Bills are being introduced into all of our Legislatures. We are being told that justice must be done to little boys and little girls, and therefore we are demanding that child labor shall be abolished. We are being told that justice must be done to the criminal, and therefore we are seeking great reforms in penal legislation and administration. We are being told that justice must be done to those who do the work of the world, and therefore we are fighting for an

eight-hour day, for the abolition of the wage system, for the public ownership of the means of production and distribution. We are being told that justice must be done in the acquisition and distribution of wealth, and therefore we are seeking vital reforms in our systems of taxation, so that the poor man shall not be taxed of his poverty, and the rich man shall be made to pay those taxes which he ought and is able to pay. We are demanding all of these great changes in society because it is just that they should come. And we are demanding that this justice should be done, not in the dim and distant future, but to-morrow. And why, I ask you, does not the same thing hold true in our treatment of the black man? Here is injustice of the grossest kind—here is social inequity of the worst description—and why, in the name of common sense, should this particular problem of justice be indefinitely postponed, while all others are demanding and receiving immediate and uncompromising consideration?

We are face to face here, after all, with a second great struggle for the emancipation of an enslaved people, and in this second struggle we must take as our motto the words which were made immortal by the great abolitionist who was the leader of the first great fight for liberty here in America: "I am in earnest, I will not equivocate, I will not excuse, I will not retreat a single inch, I will be heard." If this is to be the spirit of this National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, as I believe that it is, its work is the work of God, and even though its numbers may at first be few, it may content and strengthen itself with the thought that its two or three on the side of God are the majority.

THE ENFRANCHISEMENT OF THE NEGRO

The new enslavement of the Negro manifests itself in strange and various forms, but perhaps the most cruel and inexcusable of them all is that which we know as disfranchisement. No sooner had the Negro been freed by the 13th amendment to the Constitution than at once inquiry arose as to whether he should be enfranchised. The answer was not slow in coming, for, on February 15, 1868, Congress passed the 15th amendment to the Constitution and on March 30, 1870, this was declared ratified by the necessary three-fourths of the States. "The rights of the citizens of the United States to vote," the amendment read, "shall not be abridged by the United States, or by any State, on account of race, color or previous condition of servitude." Since the passing of this amendment, Negro suffrage has entered upon three distinct stages, each one of which we must briefly describe.

The first period, which lasted ten years—till the spring of 1877—is best characterized as the period of *Negro domination*. It is a gloomy and disheartening picture which we are obliged to contemplate. The Negro, just freed from slavery, as unfit for the duties of responsible citizenship as a little

child, was suddenly placed in full control of the State Governments of the South, and the result was, of course, deplorable. Everywhere were misrule and corruption, marked by incompetence on the part of the black man, and extravagance and greed on the part of the white man. The memory of those frightful "carpet-bag" days still haunts the South, and stands to-day as the most persuasive argument against the extension of Negro suffrage. In spite of all the misery of this period, however, this much must be said in behalf of the ignorant Negro, unexpectedly confronted with the problems of government—that had the Southern whites themselves undertaken, patiently and courageously, the political leadership of the colored people, instead of sulking in their tents like the Homeric Achilles, and leaving them a prey to the unscrupulous adventurers who swarmed from the North like vultures, the story of this epoch of Negro domination would have been far different. As it was, business interests were ruined, the old order of society shattered, and all political divisions deranged. Such a state of things could not last. But the remedy was worse than the disease. Instead of using moral force, brute force was adopted as the instrument for securing white supremacy. Colored voters were intimidated and threatened, ballot boxes were systematically stuffed, and forgery of tally sheets openly practised. Thus State after State was reclaimed, and when, in 1877, President Hayes recognized these white State governments, Negro rule was a thing of the past.

ILLEGAL DISFRANCHISEMENT

Herewith began the second period of Negro suffrage, which lasted till 1890. This is the period of the illegal disfranchisement of the Negro. The whites, now lords of all, were determined to retain what they had won. The means employed to this end were violence against the blacks, fraud at the voting booths, political, social and business ostracism of all the whites who in any way showed sympathy for the Negro. The "white-cappers" and the Ku-Klux clan performed their terrible work. But such a state of practical anarchy could not long endure. The whites wearied of violence and fraud—in Senator Tillman's graphic words, "We've cheated the niggers, we've threatened them, we've murdered them—and now we're going to disfranchise them." In truth, legal disfranchisement of the Negro seemed the only path open to the South, and, in 1890, the third period of Negro suffrage began, which is one phase of that new enslavement of the black man which is to-day the crying shame of our Republic.

ATTEMPTS AT LEGAL DISFRANCHISEMENT

Mississippi was the first State to disfranchise her Negro voters by legal enactments. This was accomplished in 1890 by a constitutional convention. South Carolina followed the example of her sister State in 1895, Louisiana in 1897, North Carolina in 1900, Virginia in 1902, Alabama in 1904, and

other Southern States have lately joined, or, as in the case of Maryland and Oklahoma, seem on the point of joining, this melancholy procession. In all these States disqualification of the Negro voter has been based upon illiteracy—the test of reading and writing. But when this scheme was first proposed in the South there immediately appeared one great obstacle in the way of its adoption. It soon became evident to the Southerners that, in disfranchising the illiterate Negroes by the imposition of educational qualifications, they would also have to disfranchise no small part of their white population—that part, namely, which was below any educational standards high enough to shut out the great mass of the Negroes. This was a serious matter, indeed, as is shown by the fact that the percentage of illiterates in the white population over ten years of age in the Southern States was 12 per cent. in 1900. To expect such a proportion of the white voters to disfranchise themselves solely for the sake of excluding the Negroes was certainly to expect too much. What, then, was to be done? Obviously, some way must be found by which the illiterate Negroes should be disfranchised and yet the ballot retained for the illiterate whites. Southern ingenuity and the supposed necessities of the situation soon solved the riddle, and to-day, without going into details, we find in general two distinct modes by which this distinction between the white and the black voters is accomplished. First, the law provides an educational qualification for voters, with an “understanding” clause for the ignorant whites. This device is exemplified best in Mississippi and South Carolina. In the former State the Constitution of 1890, after providing that every male inhabitant after a certain term of residence within the State shall have the right to vote, makes the all-important reservation in section 244 that, in addition, “every elector shall be able to read any section of the Constitution, or he shall be able to understand the same when read to him, or give a reasonable interpretation thereof.” The application of such a law as this of Mississippi is simplicity itself. An ignorant white, unable to read, is given to interpret some such clause of the Constitution as that providing that the State Legislature shall consist of two houses; and, unless the applicant for registration be an idiot, he of course passes the test with flying colors. An illiterate Negro now appears, in identically the same predicament as his white neighbor. The registration officer, seeing his black skin, gives him to interpret some such clause as that providing for *ex post facto* laws, or that defining the writ of *habeas corpus*, which a practised lawyer would find it difficult to explain clearly and fully, with the inevitable result that the Negro is declared disqualified. The registration officer, in other words, is, by this so-called “understanding” clause, given absolute powers of disqualification, and finds it entirely possible, in accordance with the law, to give a vote to the white stevedore, who never read a word or wrote a sentence in his life, and, on the other hand, to deny this vote to a black college graduate.

THE "GRANDFATHER" CLAUSE

But this mode of discrimination between white and black, as the earlier, is also the more cumbersome and ineffective. The second mode of disfranchising the Negroes, to which I referred a moment ago, gets at the desired result with far greater expedition and surety. This second mode provides an educational qualification, like the first, but has in addition the famous "grandfather" clause for illiterate whites. This is best exemplified in Louisiana and North Carolina. The Constitution of Louisiana, for instance, after making the usual educational, property and residence qualifications, provides that "no male person who was on January 1, 1867, or at any date prior thereto, entitled to vote, . . . or no son or grandson of any such person . . . shall be denied the right to register and vote by reason of his failure to possess the educational or property qualifications prescribed by this Constitution." Inasmuch as nobody but a white person could vote prior to January 1, 1867, it is obvious at a glance that this Louisiana Constitution, while rigidly disfranchising Negroes by its educational qualifications, at the same time, through the medium of this so-called "grandfather" clause, retains the ballot for all whites, whether they be educated or otherwise. Under such a clause it is impossible for a registration officer to enfranchise a Negro, and equally impossible for him to disfranchise a white. Even while our cheeks burn with indignation at the iniquitous injustice of such a measure, we cannot help admiring its masterful adaptation of means to ends.

THE NEGRO VOTE

Here, now, in this very brief and simple statement of the provisions of the various disfranchisement laws of the South, do we have the story of how they work to the disadvantage of every man who has a black skin. Nor is this any mere theorizing upon my part, as may be shown by a few figures revealing the astounding results of these provisions. In 1876, in the period of Negro domination, the black vote in Louisiana was 75,315; in 1898, one year after the passage of the constitutional enactment, in spite of the immense increase of population, the vote had dwindled to 5,667; in 1876, in South Carolina, the black vote amounted to 92,081, in 1898 it was only 2,823; in 1876, in Mississippi, the black vote was 52,705, in 1898 it was a paltry 3,573. If fairly administered upon a sound basis of educational qualifications, the enactment of these laws would of course have meant a very substantial reduction of the Negro vote in each one of these States. But any such reduction as this which I have indicated is absurd, as is impressively shown by the illiteracy figures of the census of 1900. Thus in Louisiana, where the Negro vote was reduced in one year over 92 per cent., and this without taking into account at all the increase of the population in twenty years,

the percentage of illiteracy was only 61 per cent. In Mississippi, where the Negro vote, by the administration of these laws, was reduced 93 per cent., the percentage of illiteracy was only 49.1 per cent. And in South Carolina, where the Negro vote was reduced almost 97 per cent., the percentage of illiterates among the blacks was only 52 per cent. Such figures as these show us that the Negro in the South to-day is disfranchised almost as effectively as before the Civil War, and disfranchised not because of illiteracy, but because of color.

THE BALLOT AND DEMOCRACY

Now, just here, in this statement of the provisions of the disfranchisement laws, and in these figures which show the actual working of these laws, do we have a perfectly clear revelation of the damnable iniquity of this whole business. The story which here is told of the disfranchisement of one great portion of our population might seem possible in darkest Russia, but seems literally inconceivable in democratic America one hundred and thirty-four years after the adoption of the Declaration of Independence, and forty-seven years after the announcement of the Proclamation of Emancipation. For the one thing for which our country stands, as we like to think, is free government, and the very essence of that freedom in government is the exercise by all men of the right of franchise. The ballot is the instrument of democracy, and the ballot box is its symbol. All the long battles for political freedom have centered around this very question of voting. Ever since the year 1832 the English people have slowly but surely been building in their nation, amid all its inheritance of monarchy and aristocracy, the fabric of free government, and every forward step in this great struggle has been signalized by the extension of the right of franchise to larger and larger sections of the population. To-day political democracy has truly been won in England, and now, this victory secured, we find them advancing into the greater battle for industrial democracy. In much the same way we see the fight being joined at this moment in the Kingdom of Prussia for true political democracy, and the fight here centers around the extension of the franchise to all men, regardless of social standing or property qualifications. It is only a few years since Russia seemed to be on the verge of a great political revolution, and there, as in Prussia and England, the fight centered around the demands of the peasantry for the right to vote for their representatives in Parliament. And so in this country, when the Negro was freed from the bonds of slavery, by the Emancipation Proclamation, and when this freedom, as was then thought, had been constitutionally secured by the passage of the 13th amendment in 1865, the statesmen of that era realized that the freedom which had been bought at so dear a price was literally worth nothing unless there went with it the right to every Negro to exercise the franchise. The passage of the

14th and 15th amendments granting the vote to the colored man of the South may not have been a wise piece of statesmanship—it may be true that from the standpoint of expediency it hindered rather than furthered the uplift of the Negro population—but I for one confess that I glory in the enactment of those constitutional amendments, since their adoption showed once and for all to the world that the representatives of American democracy understood that, in affairs political, liberty means the right to vote and to be represented in the machinery of governmental administration. “The ballot,” says William A. Sinclair in that stirring book of his, “The Aftermath of Slavery,” “is the citadel of the colored man’s safety; the guarantor of his liberty; the protector of his rights; the defender of his immunities and privileges; the savior of the fruits of his toil; his weapon of offence and defence; his peacemaker; his Nemesis that watches and guards over him with sleepless eye by day and by night. With the ballot the Negro is a man; an American among Americans. Without the ballot he is a serf, less than a slave; a thing.”

REASONABLE RESTRICTION OF THE BALLOT

This is definitely true, and hence the iniquity of the disfranchisement of the Negro. This does not mean, of course, that all disfranchisement for any reason whatsoever is wrong under a democratic form of government. Not at all. I for one believe most emphatically in the limitation of the right of suffrage; and this for the proper safeguarding of our free institutions. But there are three conditions of such limitation which must be observed if justice is to be done and the principles of true democracy observed. In the first place, disfranchisement must be along horizontal and not vertical lines. This means that the restrictions upon the suffrage must be of such a character as to apply indiscriminately to all classes of the population without regard to “race, color or previous condition of servitude.” Thus, the State of Massachusetts limits the suffrage to those who can read and write; but this restriction, as I need not point out, applies to the white man as absolutely as it does to the black man. In the second place, the restrictions placed upon the suffrage must be such as can be overcome by the easy effort of any intelligent and ambitious man. That is to say, the conditions of disfranchisement must be artificial and not natural. Here, again, the educational qualification for voters which is in operation in Massachusetts is a case in point. The requirement that the voter shall read and write is a purely artificial requirement, determined by the necessities of efficient government. And since it is artificial, it can be overcome by any man who desires to give time and strength to meeting its demands. And in the third place, the State, in limiting its suffrage by artificial restrictions, is thereby in duty bound to do everything within its power to make it possible for all disfranchised voters to become capable of passing the test exacted. Thus in Massachusetts the test is educational, and

for this reason Massachusetts feels herself to be in honor bound to establish a perfect system of public school education, so that there may be no man within the bounds of the commonwealth who does not know how to read and write, and therefore is not able to pass the test of the franchise.

Now, the iniquity and injustice of the disfranchisement laws of the South lie in the fact that they run along vertical and not horizontal lines. A man is disfranchised, not because he cannot meet the educational demands of the law, but because he has a black skin, and his father did not chance to vote previous to January, 1867. In the second place, the restrictions placed upon the franchise by these Southern laws are natural and not artificial, and therefore cannot be overcome by any disfranchised citizen. It is as impossible for a Negro to change the color of his skin as for the leopard to change his spots, and therefore the black man, disfranchised by "understanding" clauses and "grandfather" clauses, finds that there is nothing that he can do that will enable him to become a voter. And third, the Southern States—granted that the educational requirements of their laws were fairly administered to white and black alike, which of course is not the case—are doing little or nothing to enable the black man to meet these educational requirements. The public school system in the South, so far as the black man is concerned, is a roaring farce; and I believe that there is nothing that stands so much in the way of the establishment of an adequate educational system for the Southern black as the fear that the Negroes may become able to pass even the test of the "understanding" clause, and thereby become voters.

THE BETRAYAL OF DEMOCRACY

The injustice, therefore, of the Southern laws of disfranchisement is to be found in the first place in the simple fact that it is a betrayal of the ideals of democracy and a gross subversion of the principles of free government. An entire class is outlawed from the State, a whole people is taxed without representation, an entire race is condemned to perpetual serfdom. If the equality of men means anything, it means equality of opportunity, and if equality of opportunity means anything in terms of politics or government, it means the equal opportunity of every man to cast one vote to decide the issues of administration, and to elect representatives in Legislature and Congress. We realize that we have at least the beginnings of a truly democratic government here in America when, upon election day, we see rich and poor, high and low, men of every race and color and condition, walking side by side to the same ballot box and casting into that ballot box a ballot, which, regardless of the man casting it, counts one in the determination of the political issue which is at stake. If one man, competent to know at all what he is doing, is denied the right to stand by that ballot box upon a plane of perfect equality with all his fellows, and denied this right upon grounds for which he is not

responsible and which he cannot by any personal effort overcome, free government is to that extent subverted. What would we think if a law should be passed disfranchising a man because he is a Jew? What would we think if a Republican Legislature of New York should disfranchise all of the political districts of Tammany East Side? Why, we should cry that democracy was at an end and free government destroyed; and yet it is exactly this thing which is done to-day in the majority of the Southern States.

DEFIANCE OF LAW

But there is a second result of the workings of these disfranchisement laws of the South which is even more serious than that of which I have just spoken. I refer to the fact that these laws involve not merely the subversion of our free government, but the subversion of all government whatsoever. These laws—if I may be pardoned the apparent contradiction—mean *anarchy*; and the Southern statesmen who have written them upon their statute books are the most dangerous anarchists with which our country has to deal. If any statement in the Constitution of the United States is perfectly clear—if any portion of that Constitution was adopted by the united sentiment of a great people—if any paragraph was formulated to meet a perfectly definite situation—it is the 15th amendment, which specifically denies to the United States, or to any State, the right to abridge the franchise “because of race, color or previous condition of servitude.” And here to-day do we find this sacred provision of our Constitution, which is written in letters of blood, openly defied by a half dozen or more of the sovereign States of America. I do not believe that I have any more respect for this somewhat antiquated Constitution than the next man. I believe that there are few things more dangerous to national progress than the foolish worship of this instrument which now possesses the hearts of the great mass of our population. I believe that the Constitution is more and more coming to be a stumbling block in the path of the nation. I know of nothing more farcically ridiculous than the solemn attempts of our Supreme Court to decide as to whether some elaborate piece of legislation regarding railroads or corporations is consistent with a governmental instrument which was drawn up to meet the conditions of 1787. I would gladly see the whole thing cast into a melting pot and a new one moulded to meet the needs of here and now. But I recognize no less fully the absolute necessity of obeying the present Constitution until we have a new and better one. And while it may be little short of impossible to tell whether or not an interstate commerce law is constitutional (and such a question is usually decided in the Supreme Court by a five to four vote), I believe that it is not impossible to tell whether or not a Southern disfranchisement law is constitutional.

THE FAILURE OF THE COURTS

Say what you will, the Constitution declares that the franchise shall not be denied to a man because he is black—and, say what you will, these Southerners declare that the franchise *shall* be denied to a man because he is black. To be sure, these laws do not provide this in so many words; but this is what they intend to do, and what they succeed in doing most admirably. Never were means adapted to ends with more diabolical cleverness. And yet the courts cannot or will not interfere. What we need is a little more common sense in our administration of justice, which shall enable the courts to cling less closely to the "letter which killeth," else will anarchy be everywhere triumphant and orderly government at an end. Professor Ross, in his recent book, entitled "Latter-day Saints and Sinners," declared that the defiance of law through the mockeries of judicial interpretation is one of the greatest perils to American society to-day. To illustrate his meaning he cites a case "in an Oregon city" where two men beat a woman on the street with a heavy strap. They were convicted by a jury under a statute which provided that "if any person shall assault and beat another with a cowhide, whip, stick, or like thing, such person shall be punished by imprisonment in the penitentiary not less than one nor more than ten years." And then he tells us how the case was appealed, and the men acquitted by the Supreme Court on the plea that the statute "contained nothing to bring the strap within the class of instruments mentioned under cowhide, whip, stick, or like thing." This is a convincing illustration of this legal anarchy—but ten times more convincing, to my mind, are the wonderful laws which deny a man the franchise because his grandfather did not vote before January, 1867, and yet do not conflict with the constitutional provision that no State shall abridge the right to vote "because of race, color or previous condition of servitude." If these laws are to stand—if no President or Congress or Supreme Court can be found to resist these acts of nullification, then we might as well admit that our government is at an end, save as an instrument of oppression, and the liberties of none of us are safe.

DISFRANCHISEMENT AND RELIGION

But there is still another result of these disfranchisement laws, which means much to me and ought to mean much to every serious man. I mean their wanton and arrogant defiance of the ideals of our religion. I know that it is not common to-day to bring religious principles into consideration of such practical questions as this. But if I am myself a minister for any one reason, it is because I believe with all my heart and soul that religion is the greatest thing in the world, and, ultimately considered, is the commanding factor in every human relation. No problem is settled, said Wendell Phillips, till it is settled right—which, being interpreted, means that no problem is settled until

it is settled in harmony with those eternal and universal ideals of truth which we mean by the idea of God. Now, if there is any religious truth which is fundamental, it is that of the brotherhood of man—and we are all agreed that religion will never have fulfilled its appointed task upon the earth until the ideal of human brotherhood is everywhere recognized and established. And we are also all agreed—those at least who have studied the question from the higher religious point of view—that the only definite obstacle in the way of the realization of this coveted brotherhood is that peculiar psychological feeling which nobody can explain or define, and which, for lack of a better word, I must call “prejudice.” By this I mean a kind of inborn, instinctive antipathy which one race cherishes for another race, one nationality for another nationality, one individual for another individual. Nobody can give any satisfactory reason for the existence of these antipathies, and the person holding them is the last person in the world to be able to justify his feelings upon a basis of rationality. But the prejudice is there, irrational, absurd, and yet one of the elemental and momentous facts of human life. The young child, without any training—in sheer caprice—will manifest the most violent antipathy for certain other human beings and even for certain animals. And this quality of prejudice is carried over with us into mature life and becomes one of the most distinctive characteristics of our individualities. And the catastrophe comes when these antipathies are confined not merely to individuals, but become characteristics of social groups, and are regarded not as merely personal and more or less ridiculous whims or fancies, and so treated, but are regarded as phenomena of scientific meaning. Now it is this senseless prejudice which lies at the bottom of the existing alienation between the white man and the black. Endless attempts have been made to justify this antipathy upon historical and scientific grounds. It has been argued a thousand times that the Negro is of an inferior race, that he is incapable of civilized development, that he is nearer to the stage of the animal than the human, and must always so remain. But none of these serious attempts to dignify and explain this absurd prejudice has ever succeeded, for the simple reason that it has no more basis in actual fact than a woman’s dread of a mouse, or a cat’s hostility to a dog. Indeed, if we want to understand the whole illusory character of this prejudice of the Southern white man against the black man, we only have to watch to-day the growing prejudice of our fellow-citizens on the Pacific Coast against the yellow man. The Westerners have no antipathy for the Negro, any more than the Southerners have antipathy for the Japanese—and yet each justifies his absurd illusion by exactly the same arguments of racial inferiority and degradation. Prejudice! Prejudice against races, nations, classes, individuals—it is this which hopelessly divides mankind and makes human brotherhood seemingly impossible.

SCIENCE AND PREJUDICE

Josiah Royce, of Harvard, one of the leading psychologists of our time, made an elaborate study of this matter of prejudice a few years ago, and pronounced it a pure "illusion," not to be "sanctified by the name of science." He recognized that it was these senseless antipathies which were behind nearly all racial hatreds, class hatreds, religious hatreds, and admitted that they must for long play their part in human history. "But," he continued, "what we can do about them is to try not to be fooled by them—not to take them seriously. We can remember that they are childish phenomena in our lives, phenomena on a level with a dread of snakes, or of mice, phenomena which we share with the cats and dogs, not noble phenomena, but silly caprices of our complex natures."

Now, it is to my mind the crowning iniquity of these laws of disfranchisement, which we are discussing, that they take up these "silly caprices," as Professor Royce well calls them, and make of them the basis of government and the condition of organized society, and thereby make a mockery of the religion of human brotherhood which we profess to practice. Nay, do more than this—use all the power of the State to make impossible the realization of this supreme religious ideal. For while I believe that the Negro is in no way constitutionally inferior to the white—while I believe that he is capable of endless development in all civilized practices and achievements—while I believe that the door is open to him into all the realms of music, art, poetry, religion, I also believe that the erection of a foolish prejudice into a basis of government and a condition of social organization, which is the immediate result of disfranchisement laws, is bound to degrade the Negro, to reduce him to a level of inferiority where he does not naturally belong, and thus shut him out forever from the circle of the human family. You may educate the Negro industrially for a thousand years—you may teach him to grow the best sweet potatoes in the Western hemisphere—you may make him supremely efficient as a "hewer of wood and drawer of water," but if you refuse to him the equal rights of citizenship, you perpetuate and sanctify prejudice, and thus postpone indefinitely all hope of that human brotherhood of which every true prophet has dreamed, and for which every true servant of humanity has bravely labored. My friends, when all things have been said and done, I denounce the disfranchisement of the Negro because it prostitutes the State to the shameful work of mocking and paralyzing the religion that I preach.

THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF COLORED PEOPLE

Here, now, are some of the results of disfranchisement of the Negro. First, the subversion of the ideals of political democracy; second, the anar-



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chistic destruction of the fabric of our American government; mind, the nullifying of the true ideals of absolute religion. Other results are obvious—these are the ones which interest me. And what can we do about it? Some may say one thing, some another. I offer but one method of crusading—the one that interests me as a preacher. We can agitate, discuss, denounce, trouble, America to-day, as Elijah of old troubled Israel. We can keep up the agitation against this insidious form of slavery, as Garrison and Phillips and Parker, in the face of the most bitter and cruel opposition, kept up the agitation against the earlier and more obvious form of slavery. We can keep this abomination before the people, knowing for our confidence and hope, that a straight appeal to the conscience of the American people has never yet failed of response. And it is to this work of keeping it before the people that I trust this Association may dedicate itself.



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